Writing an Effective Resume

An effective resume is one of the most important factors in a successful job search. While resume styles change over time and from industry to industry, a good resume should represent your experience, skills and achievements as well as your career goals and objectives. This guide provides basic tips on how to create an effective resume.

Getting Started: Before you start to think about your strengths and challenges, evaluate your job history and skills as well as your career goals - both short and long term. Once you have a clear focus on your goals and objectives, you'll be better prepared to start your resume.Consider the following questions as a starting point:

- What are my strengths? Challenges?
- What job skills can I highlight? How do my current job skills relate to other jobs or industries?
- What aspects of my most recent job did I like the most? The least?
- What are my goals related to work and my career? Make sure to think about any short and long term goals you might have.
- What types of jobs or industries would you like to explore?
- Based on your strengths and challenges, what type of job are you best suited for?

Standard Resume Components:

- **Contact Information:** List your contact information at the top of the first page. Include your name, address, telephone number and email address.
- **Objectives:** While this isn't required, you may want to include a short paragraph at the start of your resume that lets prospective employers know your skills and strengths. An objective tells potential employers the sort of work you are seeking in a few brief sentences. Be specific, and make sure to tailor your objective to each position you are applying for. For example, if applying for a job as an accountant, your objective might be "to obtain an accounting position that requires strong analytical and organizational skills."
- **Work Experience:** A resume should detail your work experience chronologically, starting with your most recent position and working back to your very first job (if it's relevant). For each position, make sure to include:
  - Title of position
  - Name of the company/organization
  - Location (city/state)
  - Dates of employment. Be careful not to misrepresent your employment status by listing the dates of employment as "to present" for your most recent job.
  - Description of your key responsibilities and achievements. This section will make up the majority of your resume. This is your chance to highlight your skills and achievements and emphasize how your experience uniquely qualifies you for the position you are applying for. Keep your resume brief (it's best to keep it limited to one or two pages), but don't exclude important qualifications or experience if you need more space. Remember, the purpose of a resume is to generate enough interest to get you an interview, not to provide every detail of every job you've ever had!
    - **Use action words to describe your experience.** Limit the use of passive phrases like "responsible for," or "duties include" and use words that show the employer that you know how to get results. For example, you might use phrases like "enlisted the support," "maintained the client relationship," "increased revenue," or similar. Be careful not to repeat your action words too often.
    - **Emphasize the skills you learned in each position.** Hiring managers look at your resume for clues about what kind of worker you are. People who can demonstrate that they can handle

responsibility and produce positive results may be looked upon most favorably. To emphasize your abilities, highlight your specific achievements. For example, in one job you may have "assisted the marketing team in analyzing sales results" while at the next job you "developed a system to analyze the marketing team's sales results."

- **Show your value.** It may help to state the result of your efforts. For example: "Wrote course description catalogs that showcased the school's offerings, which streamlined the application process and increased student enrollment by 14 percent."

- **Provide specific examples of how the company benefited from your performance.** Instead of simply listing your job responsibilities, show how you made a difference. For example, instead of saying "I touch-type 80 words per minute and am extremely accurate" use specific examples of how this benefited the company. For instance, your resume might say, "Produced a high volume of documents and maintained accuracy with typing speed of 80 words per minute. Cut staffing expenses by more than $6,000 annually by eliminating the need for temporary word-processing staff."

- **Quantify where possible.** To catch the attention of a potential employer and add credibility to your accomplishments, use numbers (of people, departments, clients, etc.), dollars or percentages to show how you made an impact. For example: "Managed office with 23 employees and an annual budget of $4.5 million," or "Saved the department $17,000 a year by recommending new office supply vendors."

- **Be consistent.** It's important to be consistent in all aspects of your résumé, but especially with the tenses for each job description. When describing your most recent or current position, use the present tense (i.e., "Train new employees through orientation seminars"), and describe your previous experience in the past tense (i.e., "Developed style guidelines and rule book for industry publication").

- **Avoid repetition.** Try not to be repetitive or redundant. Use different action verbs, and if you performed similar job duties for more than one employer, rather than repeat each one, focus on your professional accomplishments in each position.

- **Be concise, yet thorough.** If you are just graduating from school, have less than five years of work experience or are embarking on a career change, a one-page résumé should be sufficient. However, if you are looking for a high-level position, have more than five years of work experience and/or a lengthy record of accomplishments, your résumé may need to go beyond one page. Keep in mind that your résumé doesn't have to describe every detail of your career—it needs only to include enough information to get you an interview.

Use key words to your advantage: Most employers use résumé-scanning software that is designed to find certain key words, which helps them select candidates who are qualified. Use key words that are specified in the job descriptions, such as "marketing," "supervisor" or "bachelor's degree" in addition to specific skills such as computer knowledge. You may want to maintain a list of key words that apply to your occupation and/or industry. Write down the words as you come across them in trade magazines, class notes, newspaper ads, etc., then use them (if applicable) when preparing your résumé.

Most importantly, remember to be patient with yourself. If you have been at your job for years, you may feel out of practice with writing a new resume. Make sure to check out our research guide called "Resources for Federal Employees" for options that may be able to help guide you professionally.